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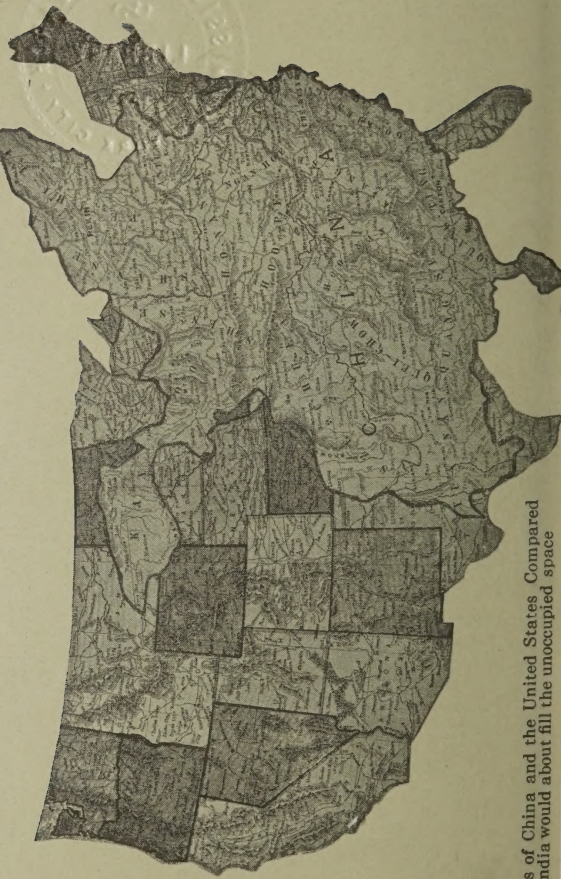
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Religious Festivals in the Orient

The Unsatisfied Desires
of the East



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Maps of China and the United States Compared
India would about fill the unoccupied space

India

The Worship of Ancestors A Day of Deep Impressions

By Rev. J. R. Sizoo.

UESDAY, February 28, was a very important day in Hindu life. It was the Hindu Memorial Day. The day he worships the ancestors. It is called the Sraddha feast day.

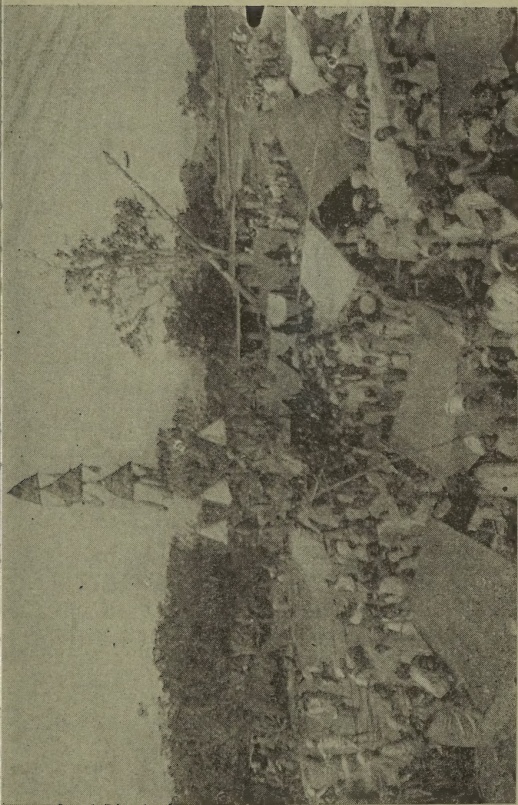
In order to understand the significance of the day, we must know its origin. That part of the Hindu Bible called the Vedic Hymns, which is to-day the final court of appeal in all religious questions, has a very optimistic view of life. Life was worth living. The "Life tired" pessimistic view of to-day was unknown to the writers of the Vedas.

This optimistic view is also evident in its doctrine of a future life. The life after death is mostly a happy continuation of the existence as known and enjoyed on earth. But in the hopes of this pleasureable existence the Vedic writers thought the surviving relations would help the deceased by performing certain prescribed ceremonies on the particular day of commemoration for the departed dead. This is the Sraddha Feast Day. Everywhere in India it is observed. No Hindu will fail to observe this day or neglect to keep its prescribed ceremonials. Old and young, rich and poor,

widows and orphans, all will wend their way to the little cemetery to do homage and reverence to the deceased members of their own family circle.

When you ask me how this belief is tenable in view of the Doctrine of Transmigration, I am forced to reply that these two are incompatible. But it is one example of the many glittering discrepancies of Hinduism which we frequently see. One often discovers the most flagrant inconsistencies in this religion which the Hindu either fails to see or concerning which he feigns ignorance. It is interesting to know that while the theory of Transmigration worked out in a later and darker period of Hinduism really destroys the whole foundation upon which the Sraddha ceremony could reasonably stand, the annual ceremony has continued to the very present day. This Memorial Day custom is observed annually by every true Hindu, although only the superstructure remains. Such is the origin of the Sraddha ceremony.

But I must tell you of the nature of this feast. The day preceding Memorial Day is the great fast day. Numerous ceremonies are prescribed for this occasion, including extra bathing, repetition of special verses from the Vedas, preparation of special food for the household gods, extra temple ceremonies together with numerous other practices. At sunset the fast is broken by a sumptuous meal, and then the sad perform-



A Popular Hindu Festival

ances of the Memorial Day begin. The revelry can be heard over the entire city. The tomtoms beat all the night long. The crowds of people in gay colored dress walk the streets all night long singing and shouting the strange weird lyrics. Others pull the idol carts about, some carry the incense urns swinging them in wild circles. All night long this wild orgy continues in the name of religion. At day break the crowds go to their homes and pass through some more rites and ceremonies. When these morning rites are performed each family repairs to the cemetery. The road to the cemetery is crowded with these pilgrims going to their respective family graves. Some are gay; some are mournful; some are meditating and mumbling prayers while others look upon this day as a big feast or tamash.

Some of the women carry huge brass vessels of water on their heads; others carry baskets of food and fruits of various kinds, to be eaten on yonder God's acre. Among the company are young girls from eight to fourteen years, shorn of the usual jewels which adorn the ears, noses, and ankles of Indian women. They are child-widows, and their shorn heads and lack of jewels are their marks of widowhood which they must carry through life.

For most of the men it is evidently a "tamash." With the exception of a few older men, most seem diffident and

thoughtless about the significance of the day.

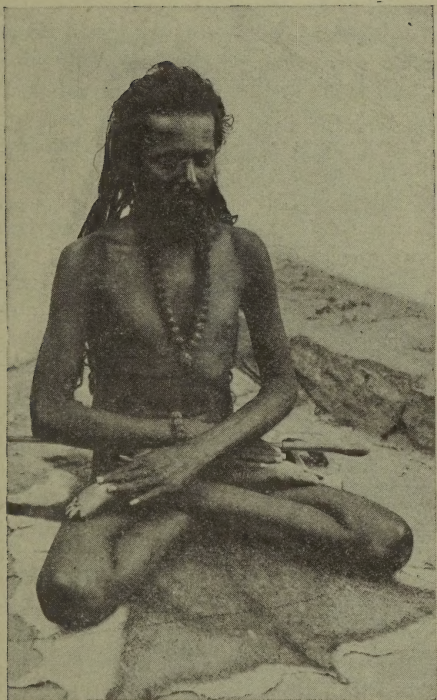
The second noteworthy thing is the beggars along the way side. It made me sick at heart, I must confess. I had never dreamed that such misery was possible. Here was a boy leading a blind man clothed in rags asking an alm; there was a group of people with partially developed limbs, shrunken arms, etc. A short distance down, were several old women with unkempt hair, perhaps playing a native instrument, asking for the farthings. But Oh how heart-rending and pitiable were the cries of the innumerable lepers. It was a gruesome spectacle. Men with toes and fingers eaten away by the fatal white plague; young boys concealing the inevitable white scar of leprosy by rags and bandages. A young man of about twenty-five years ran to me with the pitiable and piercing cry "Amme, Amme." The leprosy has worked its course in him that he has no hands. A tin can was suspended on the stub of his arm that remained, in which to drop a beggars alms.

The cemetery was crowded with worshippers. It was most interesting, most sickening withal the saddest picture of life I have ever seen.

The members of families all assembled about the graves of their loved ones. After the few ceremonies had been performed and the hands bathed, the feasting began. It is the custom of the day

according to the laws of the Vedas, that the survivors shall eat those fruits or foods of which the deceased was especially fond when on earth. Accordingly at each grave the women of the family have great supplies of rice, fruits and other foodstuffs. It is useless to add that to the less religious this day is one of gorging and continual feasting. Or again one is presented often with the sad and terrible picture of those drinking cheap whiskeys and alcoholic drinks in memory of the departed to whom it was a delight and joy. On some of the graves I saw bottles of a native strong drink in memory of the deceased. For many alas, the day is one of shameful roit, drunkenness, and vice.

But all are not so. Many of the true Hindus who really seek the Light of Lights are sincere in their devotions. I saw an elderly man sitting by a grave mumbling his prayers. I asked him who the deceased was, and he said he was worshipping the memory of an only son. He showed me the picture of the son who had died some twenty years ago of plague. To him it was a sincere worship, for the memory of that boy was sacred. He was eating a few grains of rice in his memory. Oh how I longed for the gifts of tongues to tell him the story of Him who triumphed over sin and death. But alas with my meager knowledge of Telugu thus far, I had to pass on with a prayer on my lips. As



Hindu Devotee

I was leaving him a shrewd Hindu Priest tried to drive a bargain with the old man for swinging the incense urn before the grave of his son and mumble some more prayers. As soon as he was through the priest rushed to a next grave to drive, if possible, a better bargain. That is one of the results of a cold ceremonialism as we see it in India to-day.

But I must tell you another incident which I witnessed and which I will carry with me throughout my whole life. It is a living picture. Its meaning has been burned on my heart.

I had planned to return home and was scarcely within the bounds of the cemetery when I heard from behind a cluster of mango trees a moaning and sobbing. I stood still for a moment. The sobs grew louder and louder. I went in the direction of the voice and before I had gone very far I saw there under a young mango tree the prostrate figure of a young Hindu mother hugging a small granite slab on a freshly dug grave. It was a heart-rending scene. I thought the young mother's heart would break with grief. The sobbing and moaning was like that of one in agony. Even now I can hear that heart-piercing cry as of one in the throes of a hopeless and helpless despair. A group of women were standing about her. A Telugu teacher who accompanied me knew the woman. He said she was a very young Hindu mother whose first

child, a boy, had died a very short time ago. The mother's child was dead, where it was, she knew not. Could her religion tell her? "No!" Would she ever see that beaming face of her only son again? Her religion said "no." Alas, a woman whose breaking heart her creed could not heal; whose prayer would never be satisfied.

"An infant crying in the night:
An infant crying for the light:
And with no language but a cry."

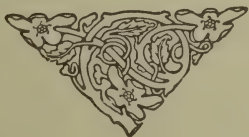
Oh, how I longed to tell her of the widow of Zarephath; or again the story of the ever living Christ who summoned back to life the only son of a widowed mother outside the City's gate.

As I left the cemetery the sun was setting, and there came to me the words:

"I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless,
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitter-
ness,

Where is Death's sting? Where grave,
thy victory?

I triumph still, if Thou abide with me."






A Chinese Ancestral Tablet

China

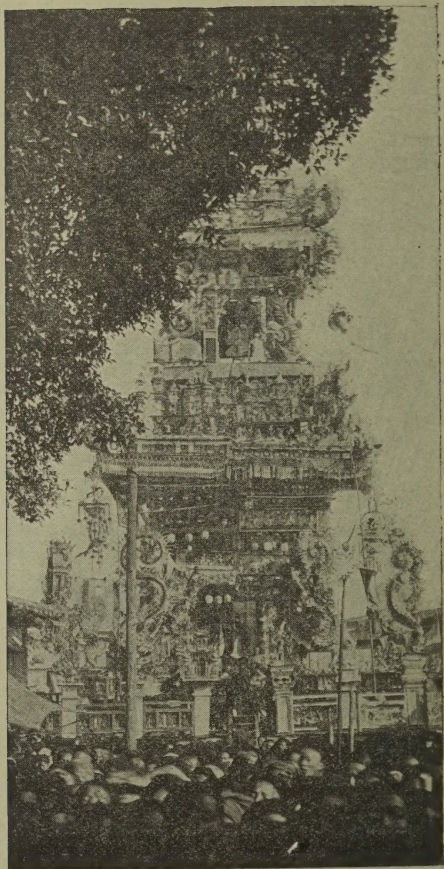
The New Year Festival

By Rev. Henry J. Voskuil.

HE Chinese "New Year" this year came on January 30, of our year. It was a rainy day and chilly, but the festivities went on nevertheless. Mr. DePree and I went calling after noon when the rain stopped a little, and then went on to prayer meeting. There are three churches in this city; two Congregational and one with Presbyterian form of Government. These three churches hold their New Year prayer meetings together each year, holding one meeting in each church.

This was the only prayer-meeting we went to this year, however, on account of another New Year activity, just begun this year. The three churches united in renting a small room on a busy street for the purpose of preaching the Gospel.

There is one street which is very wide for a short distance, perhaps one hundred feet wide. What the original purpose of this place was I do not know, but for many years now it has been the scene of carnival for the first two weeks of the new year. It offers all sorts of amusements, for young and old, good, bad, and indifferent; but from casual observation the bad takes precedence. About the most innocent form is horse



A Chinese Pagoda. With Worshippers in the Foreground. (Modern and Temporary)

back riding. Sixty or seventy ponies come here and are kept very busy amusing children and older people too. Jugglers, quack medicine sellers and picture shows, all have their place. The lunch counters must, of course, not be forgotten.

Just at the end of this street, was the little shop in which the "Good news" was proclaimed. For attractions in the midst of the noise we had prepared music in the form of an organ, a two string fiddle, an accordian, and a cornet; but the biggest attraction was the real thing itself. The people wanted to talk and examine everything when the music was going on, but when they were invited to sit down and listen to the Gospel there was a scramble for seats and we had as quiet an audience as might be wished for for an hour, or two hours if we wanted it. If we gave them a little music for a change they would immediately ask if we were going to preach any more.

Ten or twelve people visited the place every day at different times for the purpose of assisting in the preaching. Many and good were the allegorical stories told in that little shop and the uselessness and foolishness of idolatry were explained in a reasonable and not in a ranting way; but none of the preachers failed to get to the real reason of his talk, which was the preaching of the true God and the story of salvation in Christ Jesus.

After several people had spoken and there seemed to be good attention one would get up and say "Now perhaps there are some among you who have heard this Gospel and think it is very good and would like to inquire into it more fully, if so we invite you to give us your names and addresses so that we can become acquainted, and call on you for the purpose of talking about this 'doctrine.' We also invite you to come to church. The seventh and the fourteenth of the month are Sundays when we have services. Our purpose is that you may learn the 'doctrine' more fully. After you have heard it more and don't care to follow it you may do as you please, you are not bound because you have given your name."

In this way fifty-four names were enrolled and on both Sundays since the meetings were started, there have been several people in church who have been brought there by these meetings. How many will finally be counted as church members can, of course, not be told now.

One other result of this work is that a great many who had perhaps never heard the gospel story before have heard it now, and we know that some have gone away and told what a good "doctrine" they had heard in this place. This is a result over which we are also very much pleased because it opens the way for others to hear with an open heart when they do hear the "doctrine."